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ABSTRACT

Investigations of cultural values and their impact on human relations are probably the most important part of the intercultural communication studies being established in several universities in the United States and other countries. This paper discusses the concept of value, defined as the guiding light which directs a person's actions, and lists some values as shown by a study recently conducted in the United States. For this study, 100 respondents of both sexes and all age groups in the city of Honolulu and 400 respondents from Chicago metropolitan and suburban areas were randomly selected. These samples consisted primarily of blacks, Japanese, and Caucasians. Among the values studied, those discussed in this paper are individuality, money, aggressiveness, patriotism, authoritarianism, saviorism, frankness, motherhood, masculinity, femininity, environmental protection, and human dignity. Results showed individuality to be considered a primary value which has great influence on interactions between an American and persons from other cultures. (JM)

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AMERICAN CULTURAL VALUES AND COMMUNICATIVE BEHAVIORS

K.S. Sitaram

Introduction

Studies have indicated that cultural values of a person influence his perception of himself and his interaction with others. A whole new branch of the overall area of Speech-Communication, generally known as Intercultural Communication, is being established in several universities in the United States and other countries to study cultural interactions. Investigations of cultural values and their impact on human relations are probably the most important part of the intercultural studies.

Some anthropologists and psychologists have tried to define and list cultural values. However, few communication specialists have satisfactorily explained the role of cultural values in human interaction. The purpose of this paper is to define the concept of value and list some values as shown by a study done recently in the United States.

What is a Cultural Value?

Traditional institutions such as family, church, and school in each culture developed a hazy network of concepts which form the foundation for the value system in that culture. (See figure 1)

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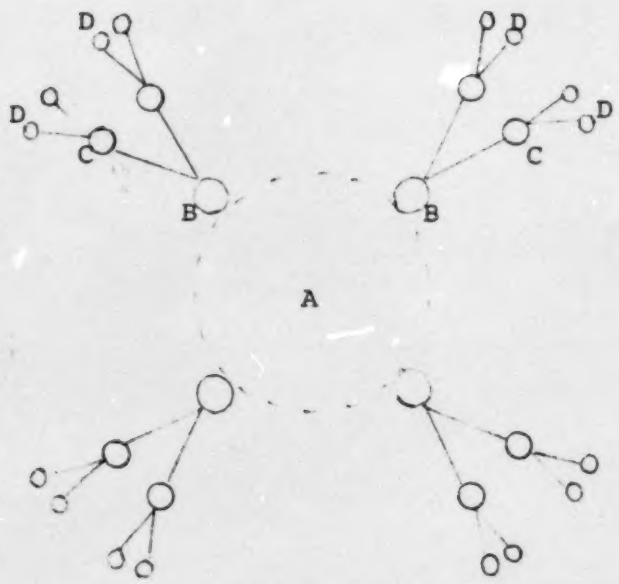

Figure 1.

A = Concepts; B = Values; C = Beliefs; D = Expectations

Each system is made up of a tightly knit network of Values, Beliefs, Expectations and Customs. All these are interdependent. A value system is like a whlel with many spokes, each spoke is needed to hold the wheel and keep it running. Value system of a people holds that people together since each person knows what to expect in his/her culture.

The hazy network of concepts as shown in the figure gives rise to clearly definable set of beliefs. These beliefs form the basis for the other beliefs which may come up later on. The basic beliefs may be called Values. Milton Rokeach says that values are central to the belief system of a people.[1] Shibutani says that values are preferences of an individual.[2] Piaget, although does not mention the word "value," says that basic concepts that a child forms in the process of his/her

intellectual development are signifiers.[3]

Signifiers and Significates. Piaget's concepts of signifiers and significates are helpful in explaining the nature of values and beliefs for the purpose of our discussion. The basic beliefs which arise from the network of hazy concepts signify basic values of a people. The basic values are signifiers. We say values are signifiers since they are, in a way, symbols of the actions of a people. They signify the actions that a member of a culture might take. They also signify what a person from a particular culture might say in answer to a question. They signify how that person might interpret the answer. Therefore, we may say, signifiers are basic to the actions of a people.

Signifiers or values give rise to beliefs. We may call the beliefs significates. In a way, significates are symbols of symbols. A belief symbolizes a value. (See figure 2)

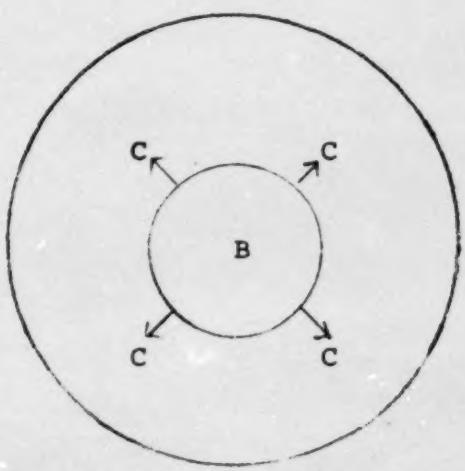

Figure 2.

B = Values; C = Beliefs

Value defined. A value is the cultural inheritance of a people. It has been transmitted from generation to generation of a people for many centuries. It has guided the actions of that people. Thus we may define a value as the guiding light for a person which directs his actions.[4]

A belief may become a value only when the great majority of a people have cherished that belief for several centuries. When we say a great majority we mean more than seventy percent, two thirds of that people. With such a majority believing in a concept that belief becomes a primary value. With less than seventy percent, but more than fifty percent, or about a half, of the people believing in it a concept becomes a secondary value.

A layman in any culture does not know what his cultural values are. Nobody teaches him the values. However, he knows what he and his people believe in and stand up for. He knows what he and others can expect in that culture. We can understand the values (signifiers) on the basis of the myriads of beliefs and expectations (significates).

Surprisingly, in each culture there are just a few primary values. A study conducted recently in the United States has shown that there are few primary values cherished by the peoples of this country. However, all the peoples of the United States do not cherish the same values. Different peoples believe in different values. All believe in two or three values which are probably responsible for holding all Americans tightly together. These are unique for all American

cultures irrespective of their skin color and ethnic origin.

The Study

The United States is a multicultural and multiracial country. Americans are made up of peoples from Africa, Asia, Europe and South America. Therefore, any statement on cultural values of Americans should be based on studies of the values of the peoples who originated from the four continents and have been living in the United States for considerable length of time.

Hawaii provides a representative sample for Asian Americans while the Chicago area in Illinois provides a good sample of the other Americans.

The Sample. One hundred respondents of both sexes and all age groups in Honolulu city and four hundred respondents from Chicago metropolitan and suburban areas were randomly selected for the study. The Hawaii sample included Caucasians, Japanese and others living in Honolulu. The Illinois included Blacks, Caucasians, and others living in the suburbs as well as the city of Chicago. Since our samples did not include large numbers of the groups other than Caucasians, Blacks, and Japanese, our discussions are limited to the primary and secondary values of Blacks, Caucasians, and Japanese only. However, our figures for the overall averages are for all the respondents including those we have not mentioned here.

The List of Values. Based on the existing studies such as those by Rokeach and Shibutani and other sources of information

such as novels and newspaper reports, a list of American values (signifiers) was developed. Another list of concepts which symbolize the values otherwise identified as beliefs (significates) was then prepared. Questions were asked to find out if the sample of Americans believed in those concepts. For example, in order to find out if the Americans believed in the traditional ideal of patriotism, the question asked was:

> do you strongly agree/agree/disagree that no matter what your country does, you would support the actions of your country at home and abroad?

In this paper we shall discuss a few of the values studied. They are: Individuality, Money, Aggressiveness, Patriotism, Authoritarianism, Saviorism, Frankness, Motherhood, Masculinity, Femininity, Environmental Protection, and Human Dignity.

Individuality. This primary value manifests itself in several forms. A person who values individuality stands up for what he believes in. He is an independent thinker. He demands his individual rights. This is a primary value in all American cultures. This is certainly a Western value. However, the Asians, Africans and other non-Westerners who immigrated to America have adopted this value. More than 80 percent of all those responded said they believe in Individuality. Individual scores are as follows:

Hawaii (N=100)		Illinois (N=400)	
M	85%	M	85%
W	83%	W	83%
C	75%	C	85%
J	76%	B	84%

M = Men; W = Women; C = Caucasians; J = Japanese; B = Blacks.

Money. America is a country whose economy is based on free enterprise. Money is the basis of all free enterprises. It is often said that "Almighty dollar is the ruler of America." Foreign sociologists have been critical of the American "dollar diplomacy." However, contrary to all beliefs, this study has shown that Money is not even a secondary value. An average of less than 50 percent of all respondents said that money is not the most important thing in life.

Hawaii		Illinois	
M	50%	M	50%
W	51%	W	46%
C	37%	C	44%
J	38%	B	44%

Aggressiveness. It is generally believed that aggressiveness is a Western value and that all Americans are primarily aggressive. This study has shown that it is a primary value on the United States mainland and a secondary value in Hawaii. Interestingly, for the Hawaiian women it is a primary value more than for the men. Even on the mainland, the average score for women is more than for the Caucasians in general. The highest score of all the respondents was for Blacks.

Hawaii		Illinois	
M	58%	M	73%
W	72%	W	71%
C	56%	C	69%
J	65%	B	79%

Patriotism. Traditionally, patriotism of a person is determined by his loyalty to the actions of his country at home and abroad. In America a common saying is "right or wrong, my country." This study has shown that this type of old fashioned patriotism is not even a primary value ofr all Americans. The lowest score was received by the Caucasians of Hawaii. Although the majority did not receive even 50 percent score, the average score of the Hawaiian respondents was higher than that of the mainlanders. Hawaiian average was 43 percent while the mainland average was 31 percent.

Hawaii		Illinois	
M	38%	M	32%
W	46%	W	28%
C	18%	C	34%
J	30%	B	19%

Authoritarianism. This value is defined as the belief that authority of someone is always preferable to one's own opinion and accepting the authority of someone else makes one's own life happy and secure. This type of authoritarianism is not a primary value for all Americans. It is a secondary value. Hawaiians scored an average of 51 percent as compared with the mainlanders who scored an average of 55 percent.

Hawaii		Illinois	
M	41%	M	59%
W	58%	W	47%
C	50%	C	56%
J	50%	B	51%

Saviorism. This value is based on the belief that one should save the world and its people. This is probably related to the missionary zeal of many Christians as well as the enthusiasm of many Americans who believe that world should be saved for democracy. However, this study has shown that saviorism is not even a secondary value.

Hawaii		Illinois	
M	51%	M	32%
W	40%	W	25%
C	25%	C	25%
J	44%	B	25%

Frankness. It is not easy to be frank and outspoken. Would Americans say how they feel about a thing, even if it hurts the other person? This study has shown that majority of the respondents would not like to be frank. It is a secondary value for the mainlanders while it is not even secondary to the Hawaiian respondents. The average score for mainlanders was 67 percent while it was only 47 percent for the Hawaiians.

Hawaii		Illinois	
M	44%	M	61%
W	49%	W	49%
C	37%	C	48%
J	50%	B	60%

Motherhood. Would the American respect his/her mother no matter what she does? Generally it is a primary value

for all Americans. The Hawaiian average score of 79 percent included that of 80 percent for women as compared with the mainland average score of 70 which included only 66 percent for the women there.

Hawaii		Illinois	
M	73%	M	71%
W	80%	W	66%
C	56%	C	66%
J	80%	B	73%

Masculinity. Should a man look, dress and act like a man? It is only a secondary value for the Hawaiian respondents. While it is a primary value for the mainlanders in general, this average is made possible by the high score received by the Blacks. The mainland Blacks received 86 percent. The lowest score was received by the Hawaiian Caucasians: 43 percent.

Hawaii		Illinois	
M	69%	M	78%
W	63%	W	71%
C	43%	C	69%
J	69%	B	86%

Femininity. Would they believe that a woman should look, dress and act like a woman? Again, the mainland average was higher than the Hawaiian average. While mainlanders scored an average of 78 percent, Hawaiians scored the average of 66 percent thus making it a secondary value for the Hawaiians. Lowest score was by Hawaiian Caucasians: 43 percent. The

highest was by the mainland Blacks: 88 percent.

Hawaii		Illinois	
M	73%	M	82%
W	61%	W	71%
C	43%	C	71%
J	69%	B	88%

Environmental Protection. Would all Americans believe in protecting their environment? Would they refrain from chopping off a tree on their own land even to build a home there? Majority of the respondents in both states say they would not. An average of 58 percent Hawaiian respondents and 66 percent mainlanders do not believe in this type of environmental protection. The lowest score in Hawaii for this type of protection was received by Japanese and on the mainland by Blacks. However, the highest score was received by Hawaiian Caucasians.

Hawaii		Illinois	
M	42%	M	35%
W	42%	W	32%
C	60%	C	33%
J	33%	B	30%

Human Dignity. Are all men equal, no matter where they live and what their skin color is? Should the dignity of all men be recognized?

Majority of all respondents agree. The highest score was received by the Hawaiian Caucasians: 100 percent.

Conclusion

This is probably the first study designed to list American values and their influence on intercultural communication in America. Certainly this is not conclusive. Many more studies should be done in other parts of the country to make definite conclusions. Our decision to use the two thirds majority to determine whether or not a value is primary is arbitrary. However, it is not without a precedent. In all democratic processes the two-thirds majority is decisive. Not a simple majority but two-thirds majority of the US Congressmen is required to override the veto of the President. Our purpose is to explain the "what" of a value, rather than the "why" of it. In fact, it is not too easy to explain why a belief becomes so deep rooted in a culture as to become a value and affect the communicative behaviors of the entire people of that culture. However, it would not be too difficult to explain the "what" of a value and how it affects intercultural communication.

As we emphasized, we have asked questions on just one belief (significate) of a value (signifier). There should be many more significates to determine whether or not a concept is really a value. For example, just because the majority of Americans say that they do not blindly support the actions of their country at home and abroad, we cannot say that Americans do not love their country. On the contrary, it clearly shows that they do not blindly believe everything their government does is right. It supports our finding that

Individuality is a primary value and that each American thinks independently. Individuality has a great influence on interactions between an American and persons from other cultures.

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